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EDITOR'S NOTE

We knew we would be putting this edition of TAGA *Sports* to bed just as XTERRA Saipan is wrapping up, so we thought it would be a great idea to come up with a main story on the challenging course that has made this local edition of the XTERRA the crown jewel of the series.

At least I thought it was a great concept. Staff writer Roselyn Monroyo may have other ideas because she got to do the best part—to actually go through the tortuous and dangerous trail, trudging through miles of vine-covered jungles, going up and down slippery ravines and gullies, crawling on all fours to go up steep inclines, and doing all that for a combined time of about 10 hours. I just think she's lucky that Saipan doesn't have snakes and other nasty crawlies. She may not thank me for it yet but she sure will have a great story to tell years from now. *Story starts on Page 10.*

What makes the story even more compelling is the realization that, after all these years of living on the island, there are still hundreds of places on Saipan that most residents have never been to. Granted, these are not the easiest of places to get to but, like hidden treasures and gems, they are there for the taking for adventurous souls who prefer to get their adrenaline rush from Mother Nature's bounties.

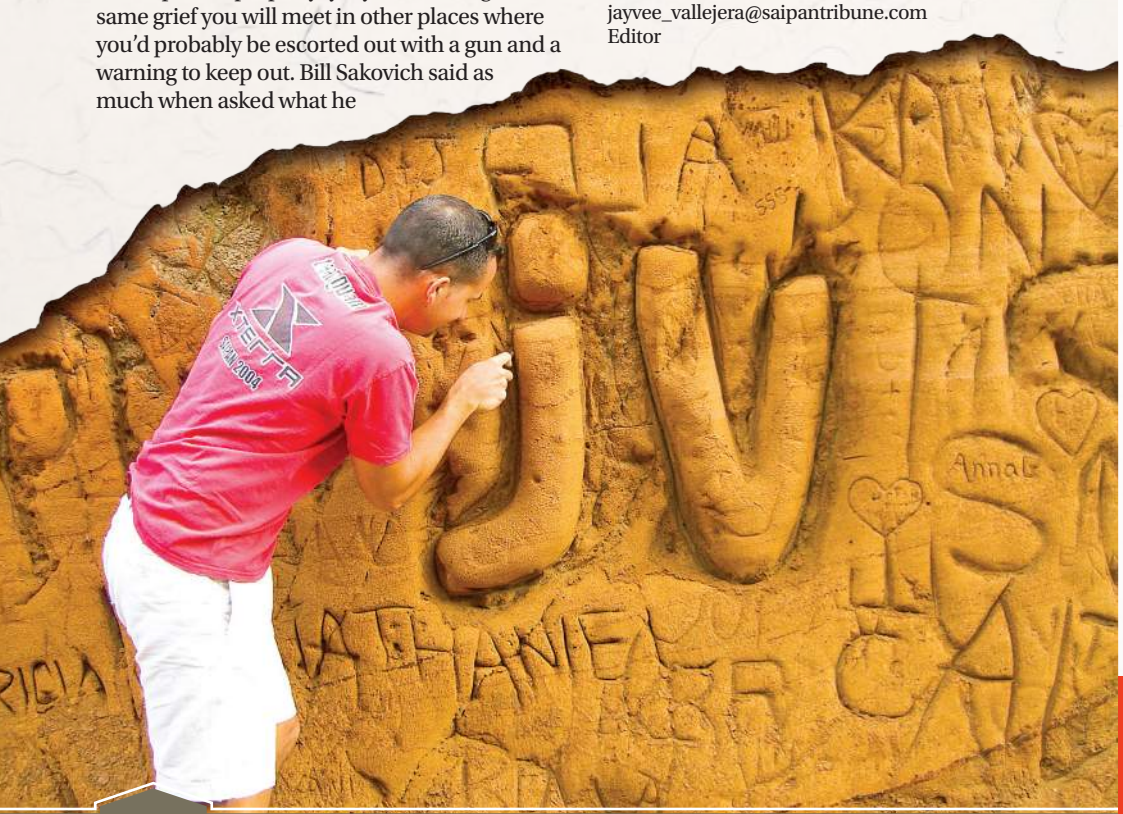
Even more remarkable is the open welcome you will get. Many parts of the XTERRA trail are on private property, yet you will not get the same grief you will meet in other places where you'd probably be escorted out with a gun and a warning to keep out. Bill Sakovich said as much when asked what he misses most about Saipan. It is "being able to do everything you want—just make a trail and do it." *See Page 26.*

For sailing aficionados and the merely curious about maritime arts, the Marianas Sailing Club would be a good place to start. Formed just under six months ago, it hopes to spark the public's interest in sailing and has members as young as 4 and as distinguished as local historian Lino Olopai, himself an expert traditional navigator. They will teach you how to tack, where is aft, which part of the boat is the starboard, and what is a spinnaker. *See Page 20.*

And, oh, don't forget to check out the XTERRA trail map created by our graphic artist Jun Dayao (*See pages 14-15*). It's a piece of beauty. As for those wondering who's the guy carving my name in clay below, that's former *Saipan Tribune* sportswriter Brad Ruszala in Hawaii. Nope, the name was already there; he's just posing for this picture. Serendipitously enough, he's wearing an XTERRA Saipan shirt.

Again, for comments, violent reactions, criticisms, and suggestions for future issues, shoot us an email at editor@saipantribune.com and we'd be sure to consider them in future editions of TAGA *Sports*.

JAYVEE VALLEJERA
jayvee_vallejera@saipantribune.com
Editor



COVER ART
U.S. pro Will Kelsay heads up Mt. Tapochao in last month's XTERRA Saipan Championship.

Photography by
ROSELYN MONROYO

TAGA SPORTS

VOLUME 2 NO. 7
APRIL - JUNE 2012

JERRY TAN
President

ELI ARAGO
Senior Vice President

JAYVEE VALLEJERA
Editor

MARK RABAGO
Associate Editor

JUN DAYAO
Layout and Design

JESSIE PAGSINOHIN
Graphic Artist

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
WALTER CEPEDA SUTHERLAND
Staff Writers

BETH DEL ROSARIO
SHAWN CAMACHO
JAMMIE EUSTACIO
Sales Associates

TAGA *Sports* is printed in Hong Kong.

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TAGA *Sports*
is published quarterly by the
Saipan Tribune Inc.
with offices on the
2nd Floor, JP Center, Beach Road,
Garapan, Saipan
To inquire about ad rates or to place an
ad, call (670) 235-2440, 235-6397
Fax: (670) 235-3740
Email: sales@saipantribune.com

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WRITERS BLOC

MARK RABAGO
While Mark went through a number of remote control vehicles in his childhood, including a remote control boat, his passion remains with collecting Transformers. He is currently enamored with the Masterpiece line of shape-changers. When it comes to basketball jerseys, he owns one authentic NBA jersey—Shaquille O'Neal's No. 34 jersey from his days with the Los Angeles Lakers.

ROSELYN MONROYO
Roselyn was once assigned to do a first-person account on rappelling. She rappelled down a 30-foot wall in Subic, the Philippines, and enjoyed the adventure so much that she made repeated attempts to do backward and head-down rappels. She was only 22 then and tipped the scales at 115 lbs. Twelve years later and more than 40 lbs heavier, she got a second chance to do a another challenging story—experience what it is like to tackle the treacherous beauty of the XTERRA Saipan course. Roselyn thanks Wolf, John, Dawn, and Ronald for helping her realize that she'd better stick to sports writing.

WALTER CEPEDA SUTHERLAND
Walter recently hit the links for the first time since his arrival just over two years ago and had a great time despite losing a half dozen golf balls. His bowling team recently acquired some new players, but team *Saipan Tribune* is still stuck in the back of the pack. He did, however, manage to make some hoops for team JP Center in the company recreational basketball league after going scoreless in his Shirley's Cup debut.

Email letters to the editor to editor@saipantribune.com or mail to PMB 34, P.O. Box 10001, Saipan MP 96950. Submissions to TAGA *Sports* must include the writer's name, village address (no P.O. boxes), and daytime phone or mobile number. Letters may be edited for length and clarity and may be published or used in any medium. All submissions become the property of the publication and will not be returned.

Jersey shore

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

Basketball leagues and tournaments are played almost 365 days a year on Saipan. That translates to a lot of jersey tops and shorts.

And with more and more organizers implementing a strict no-uniform, no-play policy, sports clubs and businesses fielding teams have looked near and far for their basketball jersey requirements.

Living on an island, players of the sport Dr. Naismith invented only have a limited choice where to get their uniforms. TAGA *Sports* profiles local businesses that offer basketball uniforms—both jersey tops and shorts.

BLUE HAUS

Blue Haus has made a name for itself for winning several best uniform trophies recently. The shop's Cecil Obaldo attributes this to Blue Haus' innovative designs and the quality of the workmanship of its suppliers in the Philippines.

Price: $17-$32
Production time: 2-3 weeks
Contact number: 233-5397, 789-8762 (Cecil Obaldo); 234-1778, 789-8638 (Windy Fernandez)

Obaldo said that Blue Haus jerseys are made by the same company that supplies the uniforms of the Philippine Basketball Association, that country's version of the NBA.

Blue Haus also throws in free muse and coach outfits as well as a banner for orders of 12 or more jerseys. Obaldo said a percentage of the company's profits also go toward the running of the Blue Haus basketball league.

ISLAND APPAREL

The largest textile printer not only in the CNMI but in Micronesia is also delving into supplying uniforms for the island's sports community.

Jun Mamporte, Island Apparel account manager, said that his company's jerseys and sports uniforms, while a bit pricey compared to others in the market, are built to last, shrink-proof, and are of unparalleled quality.

Price: $50-$60 (regular), $75 (reversible)
Production time: 1 week, 2-3 weeks (for special designs)
Material: Dazzle cloth polyester, cool mesh, reversible, cotton
Contact number: 288-3441/2/3

He said their products—which also include baseball uniforms—are all imported from the U.S. mainland and clients can customize their jerseys or uniforms by using Island Apparel's Advance Custom Uniform brochure.

The ACU, Mamporte said, makes sure that clients will only have a one-of-a-kind design for their jerseys and uniforms.

Island Apparel's very happy customers include businesses, schools, and government agencies that are willing to pay more for a quality product, he said. ▶

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LENCHIE'S FASHION

While basketball jerseys make up only 30 percent of its business, which primarily supplies uniforms to hotels on Saipan, Lenchie's Fashion is pretty content helping sports organizations with their outfitting needs.

Price: $25-$35
Production time: 2-3 weeks
Material: Square knit, micro shiny
Contact number: 233-0677

General manager Nena P. Titter said her shop is known for providing quality basketball jerseys at a reasonable price.

As an added bonus, Lenchie's gives away a free team banner, a free top and shorts for muses, and a warm-up shirt for coaches for every purchase of 12 to 15 basketball jerseys.

"It's our own little way of thanking our customers and for trusting us with their uniform requirements," said Titter.

TOPNOTCH

Opening in 1990 as a fashion boutique, Topnotch eventually migrated to selling trophies and awards items around the start of the new millennium and began selling sports jerseys in 2006.

Owner Maro Villanueva said they consign their jersey order to a supplier in the Philippines because outsourcing guarantees better quality and cheaper cost compared to having the basketball tops and shorts produced locally.

Price: $20-$35
Production time: 2-3 weeks
Material: Micro shiny, square knit
Contact number: 233-2200

She said her edge over other shops that sell jerseys locally is that her products are superior in design and material because "our supplier in the Philippines has been in this business for years and they really know what they're doing."

Nothing is too intricate or complicated when it comes to design for her Philippine supplier, Villanueva said. All a prospective customer needs to do is just give them the design of the jersey as well as sizes of players and—voila—in less than a month's time the uniforms are on-island.

She said her clients include hotels, companies, sports organizations, and schools that attest to Topnotch's professionalism in taking care of their uniform needs.

R-LYN'S DRESS SHOP AND SPORTSWEAR

A relative newcomer in the industry, R-Lyn's Dress Shop and Sportswear only opened last year, April 1, 2011.

It, however, is already making waves as its low price point and quick delivery time has made R-Lyn's the favorite of local sports clubs.

Price: $25-$30
Production time: 1 week
Material: Square knit, dry fit cotton, shiny satin, and air cool (by 2013)
Contact number: 233-6244

Owner Arlina Orda said R-Lyn's makes everything in-house, from the design and stitching to the printing of jerseys.

She said she has a small army of sewers that can finish a full team (12 to 15 players) of jerseys in less than a week—sometimes in as short as three days.

Orda is also proud that since everything and anything they do is on-island, it keeps the money revolving on Saipan and helps the local economy.

YUICHIRO'S

Unlike other shops that outsource their jersey productions, Yuichiro actually prides itself in keeping everything on-island.

Besides basketball jerseys, Yuichiro also makes baseball uniforms, said owner Elvie Yagi. She said they can work with any design as long as it's reasonable. It will be up to you and the shop to decide on what's reasonable.

Price: $30-$38
Production time: 10-15 days
Contact number: 233-0955

Yuichiro's in-house graphic artist can also help clients design their jersey. Yagi said their more popular jerseys are two-tone, one-color printing jerseys that they can whip out in two weeks.

Yuichiro has been in business since 1990 and is also into printing and retails consumer electronics. TS

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Mamiko Oshima-Berger

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

Mamiko Oshima-Berger won her third Saipan Marathon in March this year—no ordinary feat for someone who was into scuba diving when she first came to the island. The 42-year-old Micronesian Games gold medalist made a good transition from plunging into the waters off the Marianas to cruising the uphill and downhill roads of Saipan as shown in the many races she has won since the switch in 2006.

TAGA *Sports* talked to Oshima-Berger to find out how she traded her flippers for running shoes.

Q: Were you already a runner back in Japan?

I have liked running since I was in junior high but I was not a competitive runner. My first sport in Japan was cross-country skiing (which I didn't like) during my junior high.

Q: How did you get into running here on Saipan? What was your first race and how did you do?

I was a treadmill runner at a gym and still not a competitive runner at all since I did not want to get more sunburned (I was a scuba diving instructor that time). One of my Japanese friends (Monica Yamaguchi) invited me to run at Suicide Cliff and she introduced me to her running group. I learned how beautiful it was to run in Marpi and how fun it is to run with friends. My wonderful running friends and my husband, Joshua, always encourage me to keep running. Incidentally, the inaugural Saipan Marathon (2006) was my first competition, which I barely finished.

Q: What's the hardest race you've ever done? The most memorable?

The hardest was the Gold Coast Marathon in Australia last year. I had cramps on both legs just halfway through the race. The most memorable was last month's Saipan Marathon because I not only won it but also set a new personal best time and women's course record (3:09:49).

Q: Is there any ritual or special thing you do before or during your run?

I listen to Madonna's songs.

Q: Your favorite source of hydration?

Pocari sweat (a popular Japanese sports drink).

Q: Your favorite running shoes and clothing?

Asics shoes because they are so light. Roxy sports—it is cute and so comfortable.

Q: Have you tried running barefoot? If not, do you have plans of doing so one day?

Although I am really impressed with Mr. Jang (Chang Whan) and Yoshi (Suzuki) and would love to try running barefoot, I don't think I can do it. I tend to step on bad things, such as dog poop. ☺

Q: Which course do you prefer, flat or uphill? Your favorite race?

I love uphill because it is not boring. I also like marathons because I don't have good speed to compete in 5K or 10K, but I can keep running at a good pace.

Q: Was there a time you did not finish a race?

Fortunately, none.

Q: If you're not busy training or running, what else do you do? Is there any other sport you would want to try?

I play with my dogs or read books. I would like to try karate. ☺

Q: Your dream race?

To run a marathon under three hours.

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When my editor suggested that we do an article about the XTERRA Saipan course, I prayed to all the gods not to be assigned that story.

Prayers not answered. *(Lesson learned: Editors express direct commands as "suggestions.")*

So two years after having a bad fall in one of the bike trails of XTERRA's crown jewel that left scratches on my back and arms and forced a doctor's visit, I braved the challenging, dangerous, pristine, and breathtaking XTERRA Saipan course once more.

Just before I went on this journey, my editor had only one reminder: Don't fall.

THE COURSE

Triathlete Tyce Mister designed the XTERRA Saipan course and the annual race was first held here in 2002. The race starts with a 1.5-kilometer swim in the waters off Micro Beach, a 32-km bike, and 12-km run in the northern portion of the island.

Mister said he originally suggested to Team Unlimited, the Hawaii-based group that brought XTERRA to Saipan, that the swim leg be held at the Grotto.

"I thought they wanted something on the outer limits of extreme, so I thought it would be very adventurous to start at the Grotto and swim out through the left tunnel out to the open ocean and then swim to Bird Island," Mister said. "We also looked at swimming from Managaha to Micro Beach, but it's about 2.1 km and they wanted only 1.5 km."

The course designer ended up starting the race at Micro Beach, as it was required to be the transition point for the bike and run legs.

The waters off Micro Beach are relatively calm and shallow but last year, a day after the tsunami hit Japan, conditions were rough and the current strong.

For the run and bike trails, changes were made throughout the years, according to Taga, Inc. president Wolf Mojica, but they have one common theme—nature's beauty.

OFF GUARD

The daring trip began at the Anak's boonies. I skipped the swim leg, as I haven't swum in open water and didn't have the courage to do so now.

Dressed in a pair of shorts, T-shirt, and

TAKING ON THE XTERRA SAIPAN COURSE

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

Main photo shows the Sound of Music. **Left**, Dawn Hammermeister walks along the woods at Anak's Condominium while doing clearing work in February. **Right**, the entrance to the World War II tunnel located on Navy Hill. ROSELYN MONROYO

worn-out running shoes, I went to Anak's with Wolf, Dawn Hammermeister, and John Douglas, who had clearing jobs to do in the run trails.

The first few meters were a piece of cake, as we walked past fallen tree branches, tall and slender trees, light vegetation, coconut husks, and small rocks. I was keeping up with the group.

I spoke too soon. When we started an uphill climb that lasted about 200 meters, I was already catching my breath and Dawn was forced to make several stops so I would not be lost. Wolf made a "notch" (a cut on a tree branch), a cue for runners that they are on the right track. It is easy to get lost in the Anak's woods, as there are a lot of clear pathways. XTERRA participants often join local athletes in tackling the trails before the actual race so they would know which way to go as one wrong turn could cost precious minutes.

After the climb, I asked Dawn if we were done and heading back to where we started, the Anak's driveway. She said no. Up next was another trail leading to Maui IV Tank to meet

John and get the car. I have walked a few times around the American Memorial Park but never in trails. I had little sleep the night before we went to Anak's and didn't bring any hydration and gloves. Dawn later loaned me a pair that I needed to fend off sharp sword grasses, vines, and prickly branches.

We came to a paved lane (about 250 meters) on our way to the Maui IV Tank—a needed relief. Then came a trail similar to Anak's, only this time it didn't involve much uphill climbing. The dreaded climb was waiting for me at the end.

There was no way I could get to Maui IV Tank and hop on the car on our way to our next stop without climbing up a 5-foot concrete wall. On the left side of the wall was a big tree trunk and on top of it was John, holding out a hand to help me up. Much too shy to take it, I just handed him my camera kit and, holding tight to the trunk with my left hand, pulled my 160-lb body up by sheer adrenaline. Once I got myself on top of the wall, the next problem was getting down it. This time I gladly accepted John and Wolf's help as the ground was slippery and the elevation was a bit high for me to jump and risk getting injured. Not now, with the Wireless Road and Kingfisher course still ahead of me.

BIKE COURSE PART 1

After more than an hour of clearing the run trails, we went up Wireless Road, named after the old Japanese wireless radio station that used to be located along this road. The trail starts on pavement and then pulverized coral. We were aboard a car but I saw lots of ruts and loose rocks, which could spell trouble for speeding bikers not familiar with the course.

After the more than a 2-km ride, we stopped by the entrance of Kingfisher. At first glance, the course seemed like the trail at Anak's, but wait 'til you get past some 200 meters of the course and you'll see a clear path with tall trees (I saw lemon trees and fruits scattered on the ground) on each side, providing some welcome cover from the sun.

After a long walk through the woods came some single track curves. Loose roots and rocks were everywhere and so were some big and uneven ruts. Sword grasses as tall as 6 feet framed each side of the single-track lane, coming so close together that they would actually cause cuts among bikers.

A portion of the single-track course was also washed out that a biker could fall into a big hole (caused by soil erosion), about 4 feet down the track.

After about two hours of walking, I saw Wolf's green car again, hopped in to return to civilization and thanked them. I kept the gloves. Dawn said I needed them for the other bike trails.

BIKE COURSE PART 2

Call time was earlier than the last—7:30am—as we're set to cover longer and more bike trails. I was with the same three people, Wolf's son, Robert (the designated driver) and four more who brought a saw and bush-cutting equipment with them. Looking at the clearing crew's pickup truck, which had sharpened machetes and a big plastic bag that contained lunch packs, I knew I was in for a long day.

We started at the backside of Mt. Tapochao and fear struck me early. This was where I fell down some 15 to 20 feet of a rocky and steep trail while holding on to my dear camera kit two years ago.

Fighting dread the whole time, I took slow, hesitant steps and remembered what Robin Sapong told me after my fall in 2010: Lean back when going down.

Dawn and one clearing crew were way ahead of me before they made several stops to cut the long grass and loose roots and pick up rocks along the way, leaving me alone to savor the beauty of what has become known as the "Sound of Music" part of the trail. No, I didn't channel Maria von Trapp and sang while having a visual tour of Saipan from more than 1,000 feet up. It's only that the place brings to mind the sweeping vista in the opening scene of the acclaimed musical that people have come to call the place the "Sound of Music." I just stood there and watched the green grass dance to the endless soughing of the wind.

After a while, I walked toward a stand of pine trees. To get there, I had to walk across newly cut grass and it felt like I was walking on cotton; the track was so soft that I even thought of lying down and taking a breather to prepare for the long walk down the course.

It was my second time to be at the "Sound of Music." During my first trip there in last year's XTERRA, I saw bikers, especially those from off-island, who can't help but stop for a while to admire the serene beauty.

Next stop was Ho Chi Minh and I must admit I was intrigued by the trail named after the largest city of Vietnam and its Marxist-Leninist revolutionary leader. Where did the name come from? I soon found out. Several Chinese farmers who had just finished their lunch break began returning to tend to their crops in a nearby farm. With their conical straw hats and long sleeved Mao coats, they did indeed look like members of the Viet Cong army.

The Ho Chi Minh is the bikers' way out of Banana Rama and is a single-track passage. When we went there, the pathway was covered with about 7-foot tall grass. The saw and bush cutters swung into action to clear the path.

Wolf then told me to follow him for a short stop at Banana Rama. It was indeed a short trip but a tough one, as I had to squeeze my ample body through closely grown trees, low hanging branches, and thick vegetation. Stepping on some *punji* stakes made the trek even more perilous. Banana Rama fits the name, as banana trees, some lying on the ground, surround the trail.

Time check after the Ho Chi Min and Banana Rama visits was 4:30pm, so we called it a day. When we got back to the pickup, I looked at my arms and legs and found lots of nicks and scratches. My hands? Free from cuts, thanks to Dawn's gloves.

SAVE THE BEST

My scratches were still healing when Ronald Villafria and I went to the Navy Hill run trail leading to Chinatown (Sugar King).

Dawn earlier told me that I could go to these trails anytime of the day, so I thought it was going to be a walk in the park. I was so naive that I did not even bring gloves and wore just a pair of slippers. Major mistake. It's an XTERRA Saipan course—everything is a challenge!

The Navy Hill trail to the cave had not been cleared yet when we went there that morning, so we were literally wading through a lot of vegetation. It also rained the night before so you can add slippery to the equation. The first few meters of the trail posed no problems. That came later when the trail began exhibiting the characters of a roller coaster—going up and then down. It was even worse than the coral and steep trail! The soil was damp and squelchy. Rocks, roots, fallen trees, trunks, coconut husks, and bamboos were all over the place. We even saw a couple of coconut crabs. For a perfect description of the trail: Imagine going up and down a decaying and uneven staircase with toys scattered on each step. One wrong move and you're doomed.

It took me between 15 and 20 minutes of slow and torturous climbing to survive the "stairs," with the aid of a tree branch I picked up along the way. As if that were not enough, I had to go through several gullies before reaching the famous World War II cave/tunnel.

That was when I missed Dawn's gloves. I climbed up and down, holding tight ▶

1 The coral Wireless Road gives speeding bikers trouble with its ruts and loose rocks. **2** Tall trees surrounding the Kingfisher trail provide bikers the needed cover from the heat of the sun. **3** Dawn Hammermeister, left, and a clearing crew make they way down to the backside of the Mt. Tapochao trail. **4** A farmer in her colorful hat tends to her crops at a farm along the Ho Chi Minh trail. **5** Runner Ronald Villafria rappels down the tunnel on his way to the Chinatown/Sugar King trail. **6** The bamboo trees are both a delight and a stumbling block as triathletes go through the Navy Hill run trail en route to the tunnels.

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

TRAIL LEADING TO MAUI IV TANK

Distance: 0.54 miles (0.87 km)
Location: Puerto Rico to Sadog Tasi
Course Description: About 15 miles of pavement, then you run into some lush tropical jungle and stay in the creek bed for a while. You come to a vine-covered clearing and turn left and into a jungle similar to Anak's, up a steep embankment and then over the wall to the water tank.
Approach: Watch for low hanging vines.
X-Factor: Lushness of tropical jungle.

Mañagaha Island

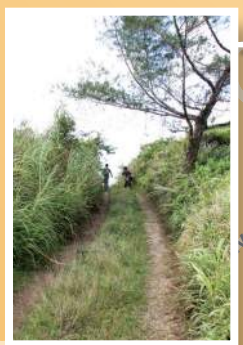
ANAK'S

Distance: 0.40 miles (0.64 km)
Location: Puerto Rico, start at Anak's Condominium driveway.
Course Description: Mild uphill climb, clearly delineated trail, light vegetation, slippery when wet.
Approach: Use trees like ski poles.
X-Factor: Clean jungle.

MICRO BEACH Start/Finish

CAVE/RAVINE

Distance: 0.63 miles (1.01 km)
Location: As Falipe (between Navy Hill and Chinatown)
Course Description: Downhill, slippery, some 5- to 10-foot drops, rocks are covered with moss.
Approach: Foot placement and light-footedness are necessities. Wear gloves. Check stability of rocks before going up and down. Watch for arrow signs.
X-Factor: Tunnels are awesome.



BACKSIDE OF MT. TAPOCHAO/SOUND OF MUSIC

Distance: 2.72 miles (4.38 km)
Location: Laderan Tapochao
Course Description: Jeep trail, single track sword grass, steep downhill, on to savannah, then on to a rough jeep trail with deep ruts (with bypasses on the right and left at the worst parts), finishing the most difficult part with huge eroded rocks and then on to a coral road to Waserak road and then the Lamar downhill.
Approach: Ride carefully but it is downhill, so enjoy.
X-Factor: Breathtaking view. Skill level to conquer it should be high. Very technical. Saipan pro Mieko Carey once had three broken ribs when she fell on this trail.

San Roque
Kingfisher
Tanapag
Anaks
Middle Rd.
Puerto Rico
Wireless
Talafofo
Capital Hill
Isa Drive
American Memorial Park
Garapan
Navy Hill
Maui IV Tank
Government Offices
Banana Rama
Sugar King Park
Cave
Ho Chi Minh
Middle Rd.
Isa Drive
Mt. Tapochau
Sound of Music
Isa Drive
Saipan Country Club
Laulau
Chalan Kiya
Monsignor Guerrero
Lake Susupe
Lao Bay & Resort

WIRELESS

Distance: 1.53 miles (2.46 km)
Location: Above Tanapag on the Ridgeline
Course Description: Trail starts on pavement and turns to a long coral road.
Approach: Watch out for ruts and loose rocks.
X-Factor: Cool ride. It's an open area where speed can be achieved and requires some attention and concentration.

LEGEND

SWIM 1.5 km

BIKE 32 km

RUN 12 km

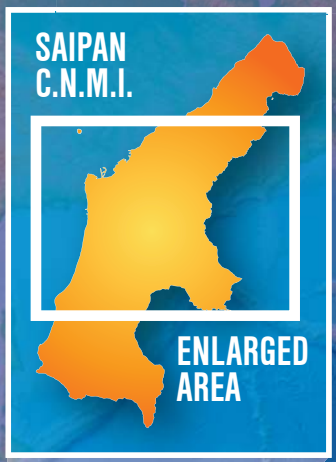
Kingfisher Golf Links

KINGFISHER

Distance: 2.45 miles (3.94 km)
Location: Ridgeline down the Kingfisher Golf Course to Egigi Road
Course Description: Initially single track, curves, from 600-foot elevation to 33 and up to 171.
Approach: Watch out for roots, rocks, and a washout about halfway down on the right.
X-Factor: It's fast and it's dangerous.

BANANA RAMA

Distance: .16 miles (0.26 km)
Location: As Teo to Egigi Drive
Course Description: Single track, down, up, down and slippery crossing a small pallet bridge.
Approach: Slow down.
X-Factor: It is just cool biking through a banana grove. Get some bananas and eat on your way out.



North Korea
South Korea
Japan
North Pacific Ocean
ASIA
India
Taiwan
Thailand
Vietnam
Philippines
Sri Lanka
Brunei
Palau
Malaysia
Singapore
Borneo
Solomon Islands
Somoa
Vanuatu
Fiji
New Caledonia
New Zealand

A snapshot of the trails featured in XTERRA Saipan, in the words of TAGA Inc. president Wolf Mojica and Dawn Hammermeister.

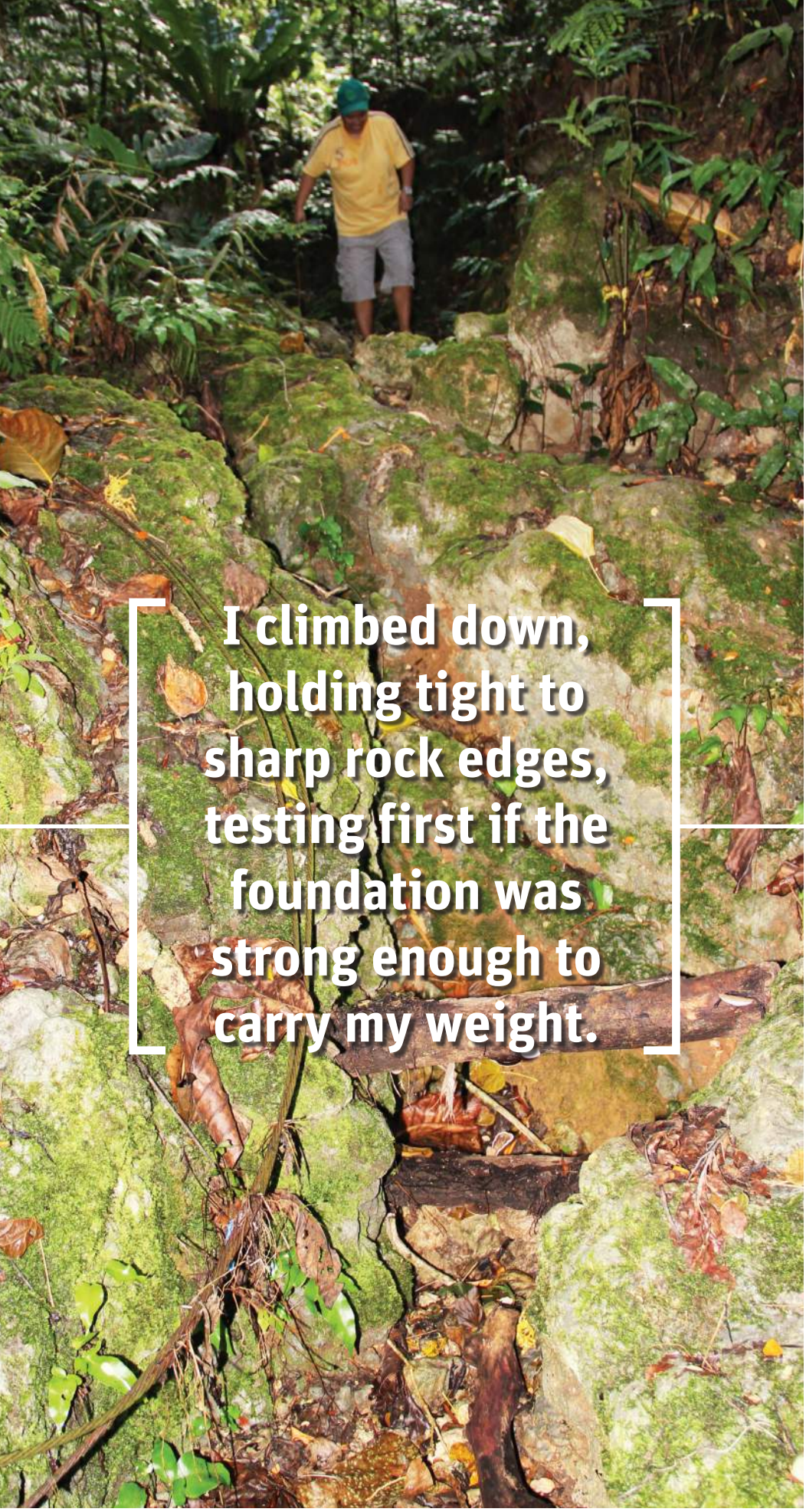
Northern Mariana Islands

Kagman

Forbidden Island

HO CHO MINH

Distance: 0.45 miles (0.72 km)
Location: As Teo (farms)
Course Description: The road behind the farm is very rutty and sometimes muddy. Be careful of *punji* stakes.
Approach: Watch out for roots, *punji* stakes, and be sure to say "Ni hao ma" to the farmers.
X-Factor: It is a working farm. Do not take any vegetables unless you stop and pay for them.



> I climbed down, holding tight to sharp rock edges, testing first if the foundation was strong enough to carry my weight.

ROSELYN MONROYO

to sharp rock edges, testing first if the foundation was strong enough to carry my weight. There were times when I had to sit on the rough edges of rocks on my way down, leaving my already worn-out shorts covered with moss.

Finally, after a lot of Hail Marys, we got to the cave, which is located a few meters above the trail itself. A rope hanging down from the cave's mouth is used to haul yourself up to the cave. I don't know how I managed it but I eventually made it to the cave, which had several tunnels branching in. I had to bend my head a little as I was afraid I would hit my head. Inside, it was so dark that I would occasionally stub my toes on small rocks. Fortunately, Ronald brought a flashlight so we could find our way out.

At the end of the tunnel was another jungle. Again, there was a rope you use to rappel down. It wasn't worth risking a jump of about 6 feet from the cave's mouth, as you have to be fitter and stronger heading to the Chinatown/Sugar King trail, which has steeper and rockier gullies. I had enough so we went back to Navy Hill and had to go through the same ordeal, again.

TIME AND REALITY CHECK

Sam Gardner's winning time in the 2011 XTERRA Saipan was 2:53:46. The last solo finisher—a 66-year-old American—timed in at 6:15:45. I covered a majority of the XTERRA Saipan course (I missed some parts due to scheduling problems and safety) for a combined time of about 10 hours. My guts tell me I should stick to sports writing and just wait for the triathletes at the finish line. It takes a lot of training, expertise, and courage to survive XTERRA Saipan. I have none of the first two and only a little of the last.

Oh, wait, did I fall along the exhausting and treacherous journey? I didn't. This time my prayers were answered.

RONALD VILLAFRIA

Left, The author takes slow and careful steps on the way down the sharp and moss-covered ravine. **Top photo** shows the Wireless Road, which connects bikers to the entrance of the 2.4-kilometer Kingfisher bike trail.

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Rocball revealed

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

A colleague once admitted that despite years of writing stories about Rocball tournaments, he is still confused about the sport's scoring system, rules, and terms. Can't blame him, as Rocball at first glance appears like a simple game of volleyball. Wait until you see the soccer goals pass the service area and players use their legs for a return and you realize you are watching an entirely different ballgame. To help solve the puzzle, TAGA *Sports* decided to go straight to the horse's mouth, Rocball creator James Feger.

Revolution on Court

That's the meaning of the first three letters of ROCball.

"Rocball means "R" revolution…"O" on… and "C" court or Revolution on Court Ball. I came up with the name Rocball because I was developing a sport that broke most of the rules governing volleyball, much like what happened when an American college player threw a forward pass in a rugby game back in the late 1890s and created a sport that would become American football. Rocball is as different from volleyball as baseball is from cricket or rugby is from American football," said Feger.

Soccer goal and Tlachtli

Feger, a native of Vallejo, California, started formulating the rules for Rocball in 1979 when he was in Ebisu, Japan, working in a vocational school in Tokyo as a conversational English instructor.

"I was watching NHK TV in my apartment one day and saw a show that was highlighting a Japanese women's volleyball game. In that particular game, a ball was hit off the court and rolled into a bucket that was turned over on its side off court. For some reason, it reminded me of a sport that was once played in Meso-America by the Mayans and Aztecs. That game was called 'Tlachtli.'"

Tlachtli, according to footballnetwork.org, was a mix of basketball, volleyball, and football. It was played in a sunken stone walled court surrounded by fans. The court was normally an "I" or "H" shape with one stone ring (similar to basketball hoops with

ROCBALL VS VOLLEYBALL

Though Rocball is played in the same court where volleyball takes place and anyone interested in playing the former must have the fundamental skills of the latter, they have different set of rules. Here are the basics:

SETS
Volleyball: A game is played in either 3 or 5 sets
Rocball: A game is played in 4 sets.

SCORING PER SET
Volleyball: Race to 25 per set and the team with the most sets won (2 for a 3-set game and 3 for a 5-set game) wins the match. In case of a tie at 25-all, the team to take a two-point lead wins.
Rocball: Race to 25 per set and only a serving team can win a set, but points in all four sets are totaled to determine the winner. However, the team with the most points must prevail in the fourth set to win the match. If not, the game goes in overtime or "o-kon" in Rocball term. A set in overtime is a race to 10 and the leading team needs to win only one set to take the victory, while the trailing squad must prevail in two sets. For an automatic set win in o-kon, a team must score a goal.

POINTS DEDUCTION
Volleyball: Teams earn points.
Rocball: Teams get deduction. Points are deducted from teams in two different ways. The first instance is when a team earns the serve and the person makes a bad serve, his/her team loses a point and the serve. If the team that made the bad serve has no score yet, its opponent gets one point and the serve. The second instance is when the serving team makes a xunk (one way to score and is explained at right), the serving team can choose to either deduct two points from its opponent or add two to its own score.

HITS/RETURNS
Volleyball: After the serve, the receiving team has three chances to hit or return the ball. When the serve is successfully returned, each team has three opportunities for a return/hit.
Rocball: After the serve, the receiving team has two hits/return. When a serve is returned, each team is allowed five hits/return apiece. After two hits off a served ball, subsequent plays are five hits for the offensive team and three hits for the defensive team until a point or points is/are scored. This system of play gives the serving/offensive team more of the benefits of the side-out system of play.

Feger cites the following reasons for coming up with the variation of hits/returns.

1. It allows a team to recover from a missed played ball after the third hit.
2. It allows a team more opportunity to set up for multiple points.
3. It allows a team more flexibility to move the ball from one side of the court to the other.
4. It allows a team more choices when to spike off a set ball.
5. It allows a team to break the predictable bump, set, or spike routine.
6. It forces the three hit, defensive team to adjust more as a reactionary force.
7. It creates longer volley and rally plays.
8. It breaks up the mindset and monotony of the three hit count for players and spectators.

PLAYERS
Volleyball: Six players per team are required on the court.
Rocball: The maximum number of players on the court is five and minimum is four. When a co-ed game is played and each team has one female member, squads are allowed to have six players apiece. Four players can play against five or six players of the opposing squad. No uniforms are required and players can even play barefoot.

the hole less than 30 cm wide) at each end of the court. Players passed the ball from side to side without it touching the ground. If the ball falls to the ground on the other side, your team would win a point and vice versa (similar to volleyball.) If you hit the ball with an incorrect part of your body (only heads, elbows, legs, and hips are allowed) you could lose points for your team. The first team to get the ball through the hoop at each end wins, regardless of the score of the game.

"I never really thought about soccer when I was developing the rules for Rocball. But because I use a type of soccer goal and players are allowed to kick the ball, one of the sport writers here 'coined' the term volleyball/soccer once when describing a Rocball court. I just followed his description to simplify the explanation of play," Feger said.

A goal in Rocball is scored when the ball is hit and it passes through the backline and goes into the soccer goal. The team that makes the goal is awarded three points. Goals are located about 10 feet behind each court. They are 12 feet long and 6 feet high. Adding goals to the game allows players another scoring opportunity.

Future of Rocball

For the past several years Rocball has been played at the Marianas High School Gymnasium, with MHS students and teachers competing in leagues. Feger wishes he could bring the sport to Tinian and Rota in the near future.

He had previous communications with people from the U.S. mainland, Mexico, the Philippines, Bolivia, England, Spain, Italy, and Poland to introduce the sport that is considered indigenous to Saipan.

At MHS, Feger said their sister school from Yokohama, Japan, participates in an annual sports exchange through Rocball games.

"In the past, we also had some college students from Japan interested in Rocball. I'm getting a lot more stuff about Rocball because of Facebook, too. I have over 1,400 connections with Facebook from countries on every continent, all over the world," said Feger, who was invited by the Rocball Federation of India to attend a national tournament in 2013.

"In other places around the world, we have sightings of people experimenting with Rocball and I receive inquiries about Rocball through e-mail and sometimes regular postal mail," Feger added.

SCORING OPPORTUNITIES

Besides making a goal, there are four other ways to score in a Rocball game.

XUNK: It is a served ball that lands on an opponent's court untouched. Baseball has a bunt, football has a punt, basketball has a dunk, and Rocball has a xunk.
Points: When a team scores a xunk, it has the option of subtracting two points from its opponent's score, or add two points to it own score.

JAM: The term used when a player from the receiving/defensive team spikes down at the net a served ball.
Points: The defensive team is awarded two points.

KEE: A hit made by the team's goalie from the backcourt. A goalie is the player who is not allowed to attack the net or even make a play within the 10-foot line near the net. He/she usually has to come out of position, away from protecting the goal to make this play and on defense, he/she is not allowed to catch the ball (as what goalies in soccer usually do).
Points: The goal "Kee"per who scores a kee gives his/her team two points.

ACE: It is a serve that receiving players can't handle, with the ball being hit by the defensive team but either failed to cross the net or went out of play.
Points: The team that scores an ace is given two points.

LEARN HOW TO SAIL

WALTER CEPEDA SUTHERLAND
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

WALTER CEPEDA SUTHERLAND

Yes, sailing is not just a matter of getting on a boat and praying for a lucky break in the wind's direction. There is a science to it that has to be mastered before one can give in to any romantic notion about sailing off into the sunset.

Landlubbers on Saipan who want in on that science are lucky. The Marianas Sailing Club is here and will teach anyone the rudiments of seamanship. The only requirements are $25 for the membership dues, a willingness to learn, and must know how to swim.

The club started under six months ago after over a year of planning and already has over 60 active members and growing. It is fronted by professional mariner Dave Johansson, along with key members Lino Olopai, Rafa Rangamar, Cecileo Raiukiulipiy, Valrech Welch, Jim Ripple, Ron Meister, Brian Stroup, and Bruce Siewert.

The club has been offering free sailing lessons to the public with a pair of 8-foot El'Toro beginner boats on Beach Road in San Jose from 10am to 3pm and also routinely organizes reef sailing sessions on Tuesday evenings and Sunday afternoons where members can experience deep sea sailing on some of their larger crafts, which include seven different vessels ranging from 14- to 16-foot catamarans to 24- to 37-foot monohulls.

They also hold general membership meeting at 6pm on the first Monday of each month at the Micro Beach pavilion behind Hyatt Regency Saipan.

Instructors in the group teach important skills such as knot-tying, proper sailing techniques (i.e., tack and jibe turning methods), navigation exercises, and safety precautions when out at sea, such as righting a capsized sailboat. They teach aspiring sailors the different parts of boats and show them how to use various equipment such as marine spikes and anchors.

The club even has three junior instructors who will soon be qualified to teach both youths and adults. The young trio includes 13-year-old Evan Belcher, along with 15-year-old Ashley Welch and her 14-year-old brother, Salofi.

Notably, the MSC's youngest student on record thus far is a 4-year-old boy, meaning the only thing one really needs to know in order to participate is how to swim. Safety gear is available, but interested students are encouraged to bring their own life vests.

The group's goal is to become a member of the U.S. Sailing Organization, which is the national governing body for the sport of sailing. MSC would ultimately like to see Saipan recognized as one of the association's community sailing centers one day.

According to Johansson, Saipan is perfect for the sport of sailing because it has warm waters and wind, surrounded by a lavish tropical landscape.

Johansson shared that sailing is thriving right now in Tonga as well as in American Samoa and he hopes for Saipan to offer similar services to help boost tourism in the region. The group not only hopes for sailing to be marketed to Asia but to potential clients in the U.S. as well.

"Some people may think that no one from the U.S. wants to travel all the way over here just to go sailing, but we disagree. It has already been documented that travelers

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WALTER CEPEDA SUTHERLAND

Members of the Marianas Sailing Club pose for a group photo on the beach near the San Jose traffic light along Beach Road in March.

from the U.S. go to the South Pacific to do just that, so why not try to get a piece of that pie?" offered Johansson.

There are also a number of nature-related activities that the CNMI has to offer for potential tourists such as fishing, golf, hiking, scuba diving, and the various marathon events, to name a few, and that mainland tourists would like to experience an array of such activities, in addition to sailing, he said.

Sailing used to be popular on Saipan years back when the local Over The Reef Yacht Club held its annual Laguna Regatta races, which ended in 2010, but its appeal faded until the MSC board members, who are also Over the Reef members came together to bring recreational sailing back this year.

In contrast to the exclusiveness of the yacht club, the MSC is structured to be just the opposite and leaves its doors open to all walks of life.

"At the end of the day we want to see a hundred boats catching wind as cars cruise by on Beach Road. This sport promotes a healthy lifestyle, teaches kids both teamwork and leadership skills, and is an environmentally friendly hobby because instead of gas powered motors, sailing only uses the wind. Sailing is also a great hobby for kids to invest their time into and like any other sport, can be used as a channel to deter them from using drugs or alcohol," said Johansson at March's general membership meeting.

MSC offers annual memberships for $25 per year for each individual and a $40 family package, valid only for immediate members.

The club is currently in the process of acquiring more 8-foot training boats so it can expand its sailing school and teach multiple new students simultaneously. If the turnout allows, perhaps we will see some junior racing events inside the reef some time down the road.

Given its non-profit setup, MSC welcomes the support of any local business sponsors to help them get materials to make more boats. Any potential sponsors that help provide materials for a boat will have their company logo patched on to the sail of the new vessel, compliments of the club.

Board members also hope to establish one day some type of maintenance facility near the Lower Base area that allows and provides quality maintenance services. Discounted wholesale prices for parts to its members would also be a plus.

Tack and jibe

Boaters use two ways to turn their boats. The maneuvers help them to stay in clear air – air that is not influenced by another boat – and to maintain or gain speed.

Tacking

Bow (front) of the boat is turned heading into the wind

Wind direction

4 Boat accelerates forward out of tack with wind hitting sails; occupants keep boat balanced by sitting on opposite sides

3 As boat changes direction, team moves to opposite side, pulling boat and sails upright into the wind to increase windspeed over them

Sails

1 Crew member tilts boat to leeward (into wind), increasing boat speed

2 Buoy

Team leans to rock boat hard to the opposite, windward (with wind) side; must minimize amount of time boat faces wind or it stalls

Navigation buoy

Tack here

Wind

Start

Example course

Finish

Jibing

Turning with wind at the boat's stern (back); more difficult, can cause capsizing

4 Occupants sit where necessary to balance boat for forward momentum

Team changes sides to upright boat; boom swings opposite to catch wind again as boat accelerates in new direction

3

Wind direction

1 Team lowers the centerboard fully, steers boat to windward (with wind) side

2 Crew tilts boat farther windward, holds it tilted until the mainsail fills with air

Mainsail

Buoy

Boom

Centerboard

Rudder

Navigation buoy

Example course

Wind

Jibe here

Start

Finish

Type of boat shown is a dinghy

© 2008 MCT

Source: "The New Complete Sailing Manual," "Racing Basics"

Graphic: Angela Smith

Is Your Child Up To Date With His Or Her Shots?

Parents may receive a reminder letter stating that a child is delinquent with his or her shots. Upon receipt of this letter, parents should take action immediately. Parents may also call the immunization program at the Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation at 236-8745/8708/8780/8781/8734 with any questions or concerns.

If your child is currently enrolled in any daycare/childcare facility or any public or private school in the CNMI, your child must be up to date with his/her shots as required by public law 6-10. Students may be suspended from school and parents may be subject to penalties until these requirements are met.

It is the parent's responsibility to ensure that their child has completed all immunization requirements PRIOR to enrolling the child in any daycare/childcare facility or any school, public or private, in the CNMI. Once immunization requirements are complete, parents will be issued a student health certificate as proof that all requirements have been met. This student health certificate must then be presented to school officials upon enrollment of the child.

It is the school's responsibility to ensure that all children are completely vaccinated prior to enrollment by asking parents to present a current student health certificate. This will ensure that each student is protected against vaccine preventable communicable disease and that these diseases will not be passed on to unimmunized and unprotected children, their families, and school faculty. It is also the school's responsibility to maintain a continuous record of written evidence that each child is complete with his or her shots prior to enrollment. These records are to be made available to Public Health officials upon request.

It is the responsibility of the Immunization Program and Public Health to provide immunization services, public education, and enforcement of the immunization requirements in Public Law 6-10.

The intent of this law is not to keep our kids out of school. The intent of this law is to protect our children from crippling and fatal diseases that can be prevented with vaccines. When we protect our children from these diseases we are giving them a better chance at a healthy and productive future. When our kids are protected, our community is protected. There are outbreaks of polio, pertussis, parotitis, measles and other vaccine preventable diseases in our region. It only takes one person to start an outbreak. Let's all do our part in keeping the CNMI outbreak FREE.

Toys for some big boys

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

For the better part of the last 10 years, a group of men would drive to the old Orchard Village area behind Hollywood Video along As Lito Road on weekends to race. It's not NASCAR but for these guys, it's the next best thing—remote control racing cars.

Club president Jude Dickenson and 15 to 20 diehard members of the Saipan Radio Control Racers make their Saturday and Sunday pilgrimage to the site for what they describe as "two to three hours of pure exhilarating fun."

Almost to a person, club members say they got into the remote control (R/C) hobby because it's the next best thing to actual racing.

"I got into the hobby in 1990, but had my first R/C car in the 1980s—a Kyosho Turbo Scorpion (electric). I guess I just love to race and it's a lot cheaper and safer than full scale," said Dickinson, a 40-year-old transplant from California who works at the Department of Public Lands.

Paul Salalila got into the R/C hobby not only

Members of the Saipan Radio Control Racers get a bird's eye view of their remote control cars from the vantage point of this recently built driver stand. LESLIE REYES

because it's a "cheaper and smaller" alternative to full-scale racing but also because it's fun.

"You can race but don't get caught up with all the hype; just have fun," the staff of the Public School System said.

Another admitted R/C addict, Emir Abuan, only recently returned to the hobby because he missed the adrenaline rush. A longtime car enthusiast who used to race professionally as part of the Toyota Balintawak Racing Team in the Philippines, the 39-year-old Microl Corp. employee said R/C is the "closest thing to actual racing."

It's racing in miniature but don't let the tiny scale fool you. This hobby is not necessarily for children because it's expensive, "highly technical, and there's a safety issue involved," said Abuan.

Abuan's officemate, Rodney Catalla, has had his fair share of regional R/C competitions tucked under his belt and in fact finished second place in the Nitro Truggy division of a race at Sonic Boom in Pasay City, the Philippines in 2010.

The 38-year-old aspires to become a sponsored driver of any of the big manufacturers of R/C kits. He said becoming a sponsored driver would allow him to keep his hobby without spending a lot. Since being bitten by the R/C bug in 2002, Catalla admits to having already spent upwards of $5,000 to maintain his hobby.

The oldest members of the club, 48-year-old Jojo Saracho, describes racing with R/Cs as a way to relax on the weekend after an intense workweek. Saracho is a staff of Maeda Pacific.

'Dreamer'

The club has its humble beginnings in 2002 when Dickinson chanced upon a bunch of off-road R/C enthusiasts while driving along Beach Road.

"When I moved here I ran R/Cs in the parking lot (on-road cars) then one day in 2002 I saw some guys running off-road cars in the parking lot and some by Mt. Carmel School (nitro monster trucks). I saw Dante Yumul with them and he knew that I used to race R/Cs in Nor-Cal as a hobby. Paul Salalila then came up to me and asked when I was going to get an R/C car and race with them."

Dickinson told him that he didn't want to just "bash" and that he would get one after he builds a track to run on.

"That is what sparked my idea. Years later he told me that he thought I was a dreamer and guessed that I wouldn't be getting an R/C car because it seemed unrealistic for me to build a track," Dickerson reminisced.

A month after their chance meeting, Dickinson called Salalila and invited him to check out the track he started with his son and cousins in As Lito. The two then teamed up with others to make the track better and the rest is history.

Shift to electric

Dickinson said the club conducts a monthly race but members usually visit the track on weekends to have practice runs to get the best setup for racing.

He said the club currently runs Short Course trucks (Traxas Slash, HPI Blitz, Team Losi XXX-SCT, Kyosho SCR, and Traxxas Slash Conversion LCG's).

They also have a stock class and an open class (modified) and run brushless motors and electronic speed controls with Lipo batteries.

Dickinson said they used to run Nitro trucks (traxxas, Revo, Tamiya TNX, and HPI Savage) along with Truggies (Mugen MBX5t, Losi Eight T, and Kyosho ST-RR, etc.) but have converted to electric because "it's cheaper and easier to maintain and a blast to run."

On average, R/C kits cost about $200 for an RTR (ready-to-run), but serious racers can expect to spend another $75 to $100 on additional accessories (better battery and charger) that will make their cars run more efficiently.

Priceless hobby

While a bit expensive, Dickinson said the hobby is worth it if you take into account the camaraderie enjoyed by members on the track.

When they compete, club members don't drink and smoke and they all get along well despite their different backgrounds.

It's also an opportunity for Dickinson, Salalia, Catalla, and other members like 30-year-old Lenmark Diaz and 23-year-old Jack Torres to bond with their sons.

For Salalila it even extends to his nephews so in all he brings about seven kids ranging in age from 12 to 14 to the As Lito track.

Forty-three-year-old Leo Gatus said being involved in R/C is much better than having a vice like alcohol or cigarettes.

While R/C kits can cost from $200 to $300 after upgrades, he said it's still cheaper than buying a six-pack a day for an entire year.

When it comes to buying new stuff for his hobby, Dickinson said the trick is to lowball the dollar figure for your new R/C car when the wife comes poking around.

Salalila is a step ahead of everyone else, Dickinson said, as his partner-in-crime will make sure his wife will get a new phone or a gadget whenever he splurges on a new R/C car or buys upgrades.

For Abuan, he gets away with it by simply saying that the new R/C car is in fact an old one that his significant other just hasn't seen yet.

Dickinson said his immediate goals for the 10-year-old club is to grow membership and continue to enjoy what they do on weekends.

"I want to get as many racers involved who like to bash and race R/C so there will be more competitors and more competition. If you have an R/C car or you are interested to get one to bash or race check us out. Who knows, the exposure just might get you hooked on R/C," he said. TS

LESLIE REYES

Saipan Radio Control Racers president Jude Dickenson, sixth from left, poses with club members while their remote control cars line up in front. Others in photo are, from left, Paul Salalila, Rodney Catalla, Jojo Saracho, Leo Gatus, Lenmark Diaz, Emir Abuan, and Jack Torres and son.

BRUNO DALLA POZZA

Bill and Jean Sakovich pose before the start of the parade of nations for the 1979 South Pacific Games in Fiji.

[WHERE ARE THEY NOW?]

Bill and Jean Sakovich

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

Bill and Jean Sakovich moved to Hilo, Hawaii in 2004 and immediately went back to what they loved and were used to doing on Saipan for 30 years—being involved in sports. Lots of it.

The two Northern Marianas Amateur Sports Association 2002 Hall of Fame inductees and founders of the Saipan Swim Club are still into coaching in their new home of eight years.

Bill is currently the head coach of the Waiakea High School swimming team. He is also assistant coach of the Hilo Aquatics swim club. Jean, meanwhile, coaches swimming as well as water polo at Hilo High School.

Besides swimming and water polo, the Sakoviches are also into running, paddling, and the occasional biking jaunts.

"I'm training with a 70-years-and-over outrigger canoe team and still into some swimming. Jeannie, aside from assisting in both water polo and swimming at another high school, is also involved in paddling this time with the 65-overs. Not as much biking as we did before, but we do normally run, swim, or paddle daily, sometimes both early in the morning," said Bill.

The former NMASA president and director of the CNMI Division of Sports and Recreation was also most recently in Fiji attending an Oceania workshop for the development of swimming in the region.

"I am still on the Oceania executive board and conduct three to four clinics on the islands each year. Our recent workshop in Nadi, Fiji was great with loads of information from the islands, Australia, and the U.S."

On the side, the Sakoviches are also busy planning sports events and organizing family reunions, the biggest of which is their daughter Anneka's wedding in Hilo this September.

Anneka, who won a bunch of medals for the CNMI in both swimming and triathlon, is a product of the Saipan Swim Club. Her older brother, Jonathan, is a local swimming legend and swam for Guam in the 1988 Seoul Olympics and for the United States in the 1995 Pan American Games in Mar del Plata, Argentina.

When not sweating it out in the water and on the road or helping out in sports events, Bill and Jean are usually at home kicking back and doing house and garden chores. By and large, retirement in Hilo has treated them well.

"[It's] great, we have everything we need, activities and equipment [are] almost always available. However, [it's] not so easy to hike or bike as much in private lands. There was always more flexibility on Saipan. We do miss the people of Saipan, although we have gotten in with our new crowd," he said, reminiscing about his old stomping grounds.

Compared to the CNMI's capital island of Saipan, Bill said that Hilo's climate is a lot cooler and traffic is a lot busier but life in general is at a much slower pace than Oahu.

"In many cases the Big Island is similar to Saipan. It's also a little laidback [with] plenty of places to go to and explore—beaches, jungles, lava flows, and snow right now. There are 13 climatic zones on this island… and we always have power and water," he said in a jocular reference to the rolling blackouts Saipan experienced several summers back.

Bill said the friends and the people they "grew up with" always top the list of what he and Jean miss the most about Saipan. Plus "being able to do everything you want. Just make a trail and do it or go somewhere and do a nice open water swim."

Bill's fondest memory of living in the CNMI always starts with the Saipan Swim Club. "The honors the club won for the islands and triathletes that competed internationally are always there. Also hosting the triathlons on Saipan and bringing in many tourists. Going on hashes and exploring new parts of the island, where it was really beautiful and the waters were really clear will always be great memories."

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Bill and Jean Sakovich pose for a photo while serving as coaches for Waiakea High School and Hilo High School, respectively, during the 2012 Big Island Swimming Championships in Kona, Hawaii last February.

In terms of accomplishments, the many time *chef de mission* of the CNMI delegation to both the Micronesian Games and Pacific Games said that taking the swim club to the pinnacle of success in the region is what he is most proud of.

"Taking the Saipan Swim Club from new or starting out to the top of the region and to some extent the South Pacific Games was a great accomplishment. I'm also proud of helping develop the sports facilities and programs on Saipan and to some extent on Tinian and Rota. Another major accomplishment is the work of the YCC [Youth Conservation Corps] and YACC [Youth Adult Conservation Corps]—youth employment programs performing work for the community and hearing from them and former athletes how their experiences have shaped their lives," said Bill.

He is also delighted that many of his wards have followed in his footsteps and are now coaching.

Some of the former Saipan Swim Club swimmers that have taken the plunge include Mike Villagomez, Tami Winkfield, and Minerva Cabrera on Saipan and Justin Pierce, Jacoby Winkfield, Josh Taitano, and of course Bill and Jean's own children, Jonathan and Anneka, in the U.S. mainland.

While he is literally thousands of miles away from the place he used to call home, Bill still keeps track of what's going on on Saipan.

Bill said his biggest frustration while coaching and organizing sports here was not having enough money to do what he wanted to do and hoped to accomplish as well as trying to encourage more local residents to get involved in activities, sports included.

Sadly, he said, not much has changed in local sports since he left in 2004.

"It seems the upkeep of facilities continues to be a problem. I don't think there is as much participation as it used to be nor the commitment to really train and become great. I think Jeff Race [of the Northern Mariana Islands Tennis Association] has done a fantastic job with tennis, and if we went back, that would be our main rival," he said.

Given the chance to come back and be involved in sports again, Bill said, "I will start where I left off and just keep it rolling and hoping there would be some funding. I feel any sport is extremely important for any kid growing up and parents should push them to participate in different activities over their growing up years. Our SSC swimmers, ran, sailed, paddled, and did triathlons. We tried to get them doing everything."

STEIN BROTHERS relieve past glory

WALTER CEPEDA-SUTHERLAND

Jessie, left, and his brother Frank Stein pose for a picture outside of Fiesta Resort & Spa's World Cafe this past February.

WALTER CEPEDA SUTHERLAND
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

Former boxing greats of the region Jesus "Jessie" and Frank Stein returned to Saipan this past February to reunite with some family members.

During their visit Taga *Sports* got a chance to sit down with the twosome at Fiesta Resort & Spa Saipan as they shot the breeze with their little brother Richard and long time friend "Uncle" Dave Sablan. Jesse shot over for a visit a couple years ago, but this was the first time the three brothers have gathered together on Saipan in a very long time.

The Stein brothers were born and raised in Chalan Kanoa back during the Japanese occupation in the early 1930's. Back then the public school system only offered classes up to the fifth grade, and eventually the pair moved to Guam in their mid-teens around 1950 in search of work.

During the sit down the old timers reminisced about their adolescent adventures when Jessie, Jesus Guerrero, and Jesus Hoashi—also known as "The three Jesuses"—ran around with Frank and Sablan when they used to cruise around in the latter's Jeep, which sold for only $5 back in the day.

The future champions actually turned to boxing merely as a way to make some fast cash, but they went on to lead fruitful careers and both retired undisputed champions in their tenures.

Jessie, the older brother, was the first to lace up the gloves and soon discovered a natural talent with his feet and hands.

Jessie couldn't recall his official overall record but claims to have fought a great number of fighters from Guam, Saipan, and the Philippines.

He lost count of his total wins, and only remembers a few losses. Three of his fights were confirmed on www.boxrec.com, which resulted in a draw to Terry Flores (12W-14L-1D) in June 1960; a knockout win over Steve Tony (7-17-0) in October 1960; and a knockout loss to Ador Plaza (11-14-7) in September 1963.

At any rate, Jessie was a force to be reckoned with on the local scene where he trained at the U.S. Marine Corps 5th Service Depot. In fact, Jessie was featured in *Stars and Stripes* magazine at one point even though he was not an official member of the armed services and he even landed a handful of bouts held at Anderson Air Force Base.

Jessie would eventually earn Guam's welterweight championship belt in 1961 and its middleweight title in 1963 before around age 30 when he supposedly ran out of opponents.

Bearing witness to his big brother's success, Frank quickly decided that he wanted to get in on the action. Frank actually lost his very first fight to future event promoter Bill Lujan, but the defeat fueled his determination to improve his skills.

Frank turned to the well-known trainer of the time, Shangi Tasukano, who helped mold him into quite a knockout artist; Frank also received a 4th-degree black belt in the martial art of aikido.

Frank Stein claims a career record of 26 wins via either knockout or technical knockout with four draws and four losses.

Frank claims to hold a career record of 26 wins via either knockout or technical knockout with four draws and four losses and also held the welter and middleweight titles after his brother's exit.

Upon his retirement, Jesse actually promoted some fights for his younger brother, including a three-bout spectacle, held on Saipan in an effort to expose the sport to the island in 1953, where Frank challenged three different fighters one after another. Frank notched a first round KO in the first match and won the second duel by decision before the last opponent opted out of the agreement.

Some of Frank's other most memorable bouts include defeating two fighters from Guam that held seven golden glove titles among them, becoming the first person to defeat a well-known great of old, Manny Terlaje, and knocking out another infamous rival, Angel Tuncap, to avenge a past loss absorbed by his brother.

Tuncap, a much larger man, was bragging about downing Jessie in the time leading up to his rounds with Frank, and he admitted a great sense of satisfaction when his hand was raised.

As for Terlaje, Jesse also bagged a win over him a short time after Frank softened him up with a knockout blow.

Similar to his brother, Frank retired around the age of 30 after having trouble finding worthy opponents.

Both men describe similar boxing styles, which basically include a very aggressive and direct strategy. Jessie preferred to go right at his opponent and never wanted to back away once they clashed. He was good at smothering his opponent and often simply overwhelmed them throughout a fight.

Frank shared that he liked to use his jabs to set up big hook shots, which he could throw with either hand.

Jessie, now 80, resides in San Francisco, California, while 79-year-old Frank still lives in Guam.

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